



NU DASMARIÑAS

GESTS01X – Science, Technology and Society

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Week 4B- Human Flourishing



Learning Outcomes

At the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Discuss human flourishing in the context of progress of science and technology
2. Explain de-development as a progress and development framework
3. Differentiate between traditional frameworks of progress and development and Hickel's concept of de-development



Required Reading

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/sep/23/developing-poor-countries-de-develop-rich-countries-sdgs>

Human Flourishing

- How do we know that we are progressing?
- What are the indicators of development?

Development is equated with growth and greater consumption. The more that a population is able to consume, the wealthier it is. Likewise, the more that a person is able to buy stuff, the higher he/she is on the development scale. The planet, however, is already over-burned with human activities. It's about time that we rethink our standards of development if we really want to live a good life.

What can you say about this picture?



▲ Recent research found 70% of people in middle- and high-income countries believe overconsumption is putting our planet and society at risk. Photograph: Seth Wenig/Reuters



Overconsumption

Overconsumption describes a situation where the use of a natural resource has exceeded the sustainable capacity of a system. A prolonged pattern of overconsumption leads to the eventual loss of resource bases.

How do you think overconsumption puts the plant and society at risk?

What are the manifestations of society's tendency to overproduce and overconsume?

Should middle-and high-income countries regulate their growth and consumption? Why or why not?





JASON HICKEL



Forget 'developing' poor countries, it's time to 'de-develop' rich countries

Jason Hickel

As the UN's new sustainable development goals are launched in New York, there's little to celebrate about the business-as-usual approach

De-development as a progress and development framework

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/sep/23/developing-poor-countries-de-develop-rich-countries-sdgs>



The “de-developing framework” is about shifting the idea of development from economic growth to life expectancy and happiness. ... In this framework, it is aimed to make richer countries “catch down” to poorer countries instead of the latter “catching up” to richer economies

In other words, growth isn't an option any more - we've already grown too much. Scientists are now telling us that we're **blowing past planetary boundaries** at breakneck speed. And the hard truth is that this global crisis is due almost entirely to **overconsumption in rich countries**.

“ Instead of pushing poor countries to 'catch up' with rich ones, we should be getting rich countries to 'catch down' ”

Right now, our planet only has enough resources for each of us to consume 1.8 “**global hectares**” annually - a standardised unit that measures resource use and waste. This figure is roughly what the average person in Ghana or Guatemala consumes. By contrast, people in the US and Canada consume about 8 hectares per person, while Europeans consume 4.7 hectares - many times their fair share.

What does this mean for our theory of development? Economist **Peter Edward argues** that instead of pushing poorer countries to “catch up” with rich ones, we should be thinking of ways to get rich countries to “catch down” to more appropriate levels of development. We should look at societies where people live long and happy lives at relatively low levels of income and consumption not as basket cases that need to be developed towards western models, but as exemplars of efficient living.



Global Footprint

<https://www.footprintcalculator.org/>

70% of people in middle- and high-income countries believe overconsumption is putting our planet and society at risk

The idea of “de-developing” rich countries might prove to be a strong rallying cry in the global south, but it will be tricky to sell to westerners. Tricky, but not impossible. According to [recent consumer research](#), 70% of people in middle- and high-income countries believe overconsumption is putting our planet and society at risk. A similar majority also believe we should strive to buy and own less, and that doing so would not compromise our happiness. People sense there is something wrong with the dominant model of economic progress and they are hungry for an alternative narrative.

The problem is that the pundits promoting this kind of transition are using the wrong language. They use terms such as [de-growth](#), [zero growth](#) or - worst of all - de-development, which are technically accurate but off-putting for anyone who’s not already on board. Such terms are repulsive because they run against the deepest frames we use to think about human progress, and, indeed, the purpose of life itself. It’s like asking people to stop moving positively thorough life, to stop learning, improving, growing.

Perhaps we might take a cue from Latin Americans, who are organising alternative visions around the indigenous concept of buen vivir, or good living. The west has its own tradition of reflection on the good life and it's time we revive it. Robert and Edward Skidelsky take us down this road in his book How Much is Enough? where they lay out the possibility of interventions such as banning advertising, a shorter working week and a basic income, all of which would improve our lives while reducing consumption.

Either we slow down voluntarily or climate change will do it for us. We can't go on ignoring the laws of nature. But rethinking our theory of progress is not only an ecological imperative, it is also a development one. If we do not act soon, all our hard-won gains against poverty will evaporate, as food systems collapse and mass famine re-emerges to an extent not seen since the 19th century.

This is not about giving anything up. And it's certainly not about living a life of voluntary misery or imposing harsh limits on human potential. On the contrary, it's about reaching a higher level of understanding and consciousness about what we're doing here and why.



The Magician's Twin: C.S. Lewis and the Case against Scientism

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPeyJvXU68k>



References

- <https://georgezapo.com/environmental-health/overconsumption/>
- The Story of Stuff:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GorqroigqM&t=400s>

Thank you for listening.

